

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Chestnut-rumped Thornbills robbing meat ants - On the afternoon of 4 October 2004, I watched a pair of Chestnut-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza uropygialis* in the vicinity of a Wheatbelt Wandoo *Eucalyptus capillosa*, that contained a hollow in which the birds had previously nested. For 30 minutes the pair fluttered to the trunk of the wandoo and pecked at meat ants that were moving on it. After each attack, an ant fell to the ground and I surmised that the birds were defending their eggs or nestlings. However, the nest was not occupied. A more likely explanation of this unusual behaviour could be that the thornbills were robbing the ants of the small white items (perhaps lerps) they were carrying. Splendid Fairy-wrens *Malurus splendens* will often rob meat ants moving on their trails and mounds (Rowley and Russell 1997 in *Fairy-wrens and Grasswrens*, Oxford University Press; Oxford; and personal observation), but I have not previously seen this foraging technique undertaken arboreally or by thornbills.

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Unusual behaviours by White-fronted Chats and Black-faced Woodswallows - On 12 November 2004, LB observed about 50 White-fronted Chats *Epthianura albifrons* perched in low shrubs

on an open area of our farm, Capillosa, that is regenerating after being cleared and cropped once in the late 1980s. Capillosa is situated 15km north-east of Westonia, Western Australia. Nearly all birds were carrying a small (1-1.5 cm long) white larva in the bill. The area was revisited the following morning and, on this occasion, at least 100 chats were present, all with white larvae in their bills. MB watched a male and two females (all apparently adult) for 30 minutes, during which time they remained perched in adjacent bushes with no calling or other interactions between them, except for one female who flew about 100 m away, perched for some minutes, and then returned to the original site with the larva still in her bill.

A pair of Black-faced Woodswallows *Artamus cinereus* had a nest with two small chicks in the middle of the chat congregation. They were circling low over the assembled chats, occasionally diving down on a perched bird. When a group of about 30 chats took flight and headed south, rapidly gaining height, one of the woodswallows accompanied them, flying in or just behind the flock until all were out of sight.

It is possible to explain the behaviour of the woodswallows - rather than chasing the chats from their nesting area, it is more likely that they were robbing the

chats of food. Although the interaction between the chats and woodswallows occurred some distance from the observer (>100 m), it appeared to be similar to the kleptoparasitism described by Recher and Davis in 2005 (Corella 29:13–14). They observed Black-faced Woodswallows stealing lepidopteran larvae from Crimson Chats *E. tricolor* at Mt Magnet. We cannot, however, find a ready explanation for the food carrying behaviour of our chats. They were not nesting, they were not feeding, seasonal conditions were not conducive for breeding and there had been no previous records of chats in the area during 2004. What were they doing?

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Perentie, *Varanus giganteus*, in Kalbarri National Park – On 11 November 2005, I observed and photographed an adult Perentie in Kalbarri National Park. The lizard was initially motionless in a boulder pile a few dozen metres from the top of the trail leading from Ross Graham Lookout down to the Murchison River. This is slightly outside of the published ranges for this species from Pianka, E.R. and King, D.R. (eds.). 2004 (*Varanoid Lizards of the World*) and Thompson, S.A., Withers, P.C., Thompson, G.G., and Robinson, D. 2005 (Range extension for the Perentie, *Varanus giganteus*. *Journal Royal*

Society of Western Australia, 88, pp. 41–43). The nearest sighting from Thompson *et al.* (2005) was where the Murchison River crosses the Great Northern Highway (Graham Thompson, personal communication), which is at least 20km east of my sighting. Pianka and King show only sightings still further to the east in this region.

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Status and pre-migrating aggregations of Tree Martins on Rottnest Island – The Tree Martin, *Hirundo nigricans* is regarded as a common and regular visitor to Rottnest Island with greatest numbers present during summer and early autumn (D. Saunders and P. de Rebeira, 1985, *The Birdlife of Rottnest Island*. Book published by the authors). Saunders and de Rebeira noted that in the late 1950's and early 1960's Tree Martins were then an uncommon visitor with only a few birds, usually less than five, visiting the island in most summers, but by the 1980's it was visiting in mobs of hundreds (600 plus) all over the island. Saunders and de Rebeira reported breeding in August 1983 in the wooden tower at Wagemup Hill and noted that few suitable breeding trees occur on Rottnest Island.

Regular visits since 2002 to